

Families in every State, region, and corner of our country are facing the same challenges as the Albericis. Jeff and others like him were raised to believe that doing important work, such as being a schoolteacher, wouldn't make you rich but it would provide enough to live comfortably and raise a family. The middle-class dream—that American dream—is vanishing before our eyes.

Today, oil is trading near record levels again. It is up around \$140 a barrel. Gasoline now averages \$4.08 a gallon nationally, and in Nevada it is \$4.24 a gallon. This morning, we learned that utility companies across the country are raising rates another 29 percent on top of the 30-percent increases American consumers have already endured over the past 5 years.

On President Bush's watch, American families are earning less today than they did 8 years ago—and that is the truth—yet paying more than ever for everyday necessities, such as gasoline, heat for the home, and of course groceries. And they are paying more than ever for long-term needs, such as the goal of health care, college, and retirement. American families can't survive this squeeze indefinitely.

Right now, many are able to keep their heads above water by saving less, and sometimes not saving, and finding other ways to tighten their belts. Like the Albericis, they are eating more grilled cheese and putting less of their paychecks into savings.

Most Americans are too busy figuring out how to pay the bills and make ends meet to pay close attention to what is going on here in Congress. But if working families see one thing from Congress, it is this: Democrats get it. That is what Jeff said in his radio address. We know what is happening in America, and we are fighting every single day to make things better.

Republicans? They talk about our country's problems, but when the time comes to stand up and take action, they are nowhere to be found. Republicans talk about high gas prices, alternative energy, the housing crisis, and job loss, but each time there has been a proposed solution to those challenges, Republicans have said no.

Our Republican colleagues fill endless pages of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD with speeches about the affordability crisis in America that a Republican President created and the Republican nominee, JOHN MCCAIN, hopes to continue, but the American people need more than empty words.

Republicans can choose to keep standing on the sidelines, or keep sticking with the status quo, which they have done now for the entire year and a half we have been in the majority. They have that right. But Democrats will keep fighting to make the American dream affordable again for the Albericis of Auburn, NY, and the millions of American families like them who deserve better. Today we will give Republicans another oppor-

tunity to do the right thing by voting for cloture on the energy tax extenders bill. This legislation would lower taxes for businesses, entrepreneurs, and families. The deduction for State and local sales taxes helps level the playing field and provides tax relief to residents in States with no income tax. The tuition deduction helps families afford the skyrocketing cost of college. The teachers' deduction provides a small but important bit of help and appreciation to educators for out-of-pocket classroom expenses.

This legislation would also extend tax benefits for businesses, particularly those engaged in research and development for clean renewable energy, tax credits, Mr. President, for clean renewable energy. Today we are going to use 21 million barrels of oil. That is not necessary. We could change that. We need to allow the great business minds of America to invest in renewable energy—the Sun, the wind, geothermal. That is what this vote at 5:30 today is all about.

Republicans have opposed this legislation in the past because it is paid for and will not increase the national debt. How do we pay for these tax cuts for businesses and families? By closing a loophole that allows superwealthy hedge fund managers to avoid paying tax on their earnings.

This is unique, that the Republicans would oppose this. The hedge fund operators even know it is unfair and they support us on this. Why anyone opposes legislation on these grounds is beyond the ability of the American people to comprehend. Why Republicans would oppose tax relief for businesses and families in order to protect a tax loophole for multimillionaires seems preposterous. And keep in mind, even the hedge fund operators, I repeat, believe it would be fair to do what we seek.

Republicans have the right to side with hedge fund multimillionaires over small businesses and families. They have already done so by blocking the tax extenders bill twice this year. Now they have a third chance to reverse course and support this legislation. Maybe this week enough Republicans will see the suffering in their States and break with the President and Republican Senate leaders to do the right thing. Maybe this is the time enough Republicans will say enough is enough.

I know our Republican colleagues see the terrible economic burden the American people are carrying. The only question is, will they let it continue or join us in doing something about it? For all the Republicans sitting on the fence, and there are some seeing how bad things have gotten but still not ready to stand up to the Republican Party, I ask: If not now, when? Democrats stand ready to legislate. Join us and we can begin repairing the damage and restoring the American Dream.

I acknowledge that on the Medicare fix we tried to do last week, we got nine Republicans who supported us.

Had we had Senator KENNEDY back—and he soon will be back, and a few other Senators—we would have been able to have 60 votes. So I am glad to see that my friends on the other side, even though not enough, are coming forward and voting with us. We hope there will be more of that in the future.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO TIM RUSSERT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as Washington, and all of America, continue to pay tribute to Tim Russert, I wish to add a few more words about a man who impacted everybody in this body in one way or another over the years.

I have been a fairly regular guest on "Meet the Press" over the years, so I got to know Tim Russert primarily as a tough interviewer, but I also came to appreciate and admire his extraordinary people skills, which were as good as those of any politician here in Washington.

I remember him saying once that his son Luke was a big fan of Tubby Smith, the old UK Wildcats basketball coach. I think Luke even went to Tubby's basketball camp one summer. Well, anytime I or anybody else on the staff got on the phone with Tim, he would also start off with "Go Cats." It is just one example of the great mind he had for small personal details and how he employed that skill in a totally unpretentious way.

He also knew I was a Louisville Cardinal basketball fan, and he invariably would turn the subject to Rick Patino and his considerable skills, and that is a way in which he kind of related to everybody.

Bill Kristol was getting at the same thing in his column this morning, in which he related a story that has been around this town for a while. The story goes that when Pat Moynihan was trying to convince Tim to come down to the Capitol to be his Chief of Staff, Tim didn't want to come because Moynihan's office was all Ph.Ds and intellectuals. He didn't think he would fit in. Moynihan said:

Tim, the things they know you can learn. But the things you know they can never learn.

So as Tim Russert rose to the height of his profession, it became clear Pat Moynihan was right on target.

I found it particularly moving to see Luke paying tribute to his father on television this morning. As Tim often said, being a good father was the job he put the most stock in, and it appears he has done a superb job in that respect as well.

TAX EXTENDERS BILL

Today the Senate will vote on whether to proceed to the House-passed tax